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SUBJECT: Journey to the West: Habitat For Humanity's Will
to Do Good in Guangxi

Ref: A) Guangzhou 5778 and previous, B) Guangzhou 4043

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: Consulate Guangzhou is assisting Habitat
for Humanity's Guangxi branch to continue its projects
there through a partnership with Guangxi University's
College of Civil Engineering and Architecture which can
provide legal cover for Habitat since it cannot register as
a non-governmental organization (NGO) under Chinese law.
Habitat's proposal is currently under consideration by the
University's administration. Habitat does excellent work
in Guangxi, as the Consulate witnessed in visiting one
project in Wuzhou City in a village that suffered damage
during the June 2005 floods (ref B) and a second one
further south in Fusui benefiting 10 leprosy patients
living in an impoverished, isolated rural area. End
Summary.

It Isn't Easy Doing Good

¶2. (SBU) Habitat for Humanity (HFH) wants to and is doing
good in Guangxi, despite some difficulties and setbacks. A
look at two of their projects by Congenoffs justifies this
conclusion. The Habitat project in Wuzhou had been in the
planning phase since the June 2005 floods but ran into
funding difficulties. The project was originally supposed
to be funded by a Hong Kong business and was to build
hundreds of homes. Unfortunately, the Hong Kong business
pulled out at the last minute, preferring instead to donate
its funds to Guangdong Province where it has business
operations. In the end, Habitat's International office
came through with a loan program that would build eleven
homes. The loan is a five-year loan with a 2% per year
inflation adjustment. The eleven homes are going to eleven
families. The families benefiting from the project in
these villages build the homes themselves. Although
several volunteer teams were scheduled to assist with the
build, many dropped out because of the fear of bird flu.
Each home is approximately 80 square meters with four or
five rooms and is consistent with housing in the
countryside. The owners have designed the buildings
themselves, often including the future possibility to build
an addition on the flat roof. Despite several financial
setbacks, the project was completed in time for the
families to move into their new homes in a semi-finished

state before the Chinese New Year.

Assistance to Leprosy Patients

13. (U) En route to southern Guangxi, we visited a second Habitat for Humanity (HFH) site, located at a ten-person leprosy rehabilitation site in Fusui County. The leprosy housing site is located thirty-five minutes off the main highway, on a bumpy dirt road that passes through one town and several villages of varying degrees of development. Local officials pointed out that Fusui is one of the more agriculturally developed areas in the prefecture, but we noted a very low proportion of motorized vehicles, many ox-drawn carts, and manual labor that in other underdeveloped areas would have been done by machine, thus demonstrating the poor and backward nature of this area of Guangxi. Many agricultural carts were being pulled by hand.

14. (U) Before the leprosy housing site was created in the 1950's, these 10 leprosy patients, all of whom are now elderly, were forced to live in simple cave homes they had dug in nearby hills. The government then built a leprosarium, but this building has since fallen into ruin. Government funding for the site withered over the years and rehabilitation is nonexistent, but local officials revived financial and official administrative support for the people living there once HFH showed an interest in the site, though local farmers living in the area have not been supportive. Most HFH projects are funded through homeowners' incomes and are built by the homeowners themselves, but because virtually all of these leprosy patients have lost limbs, and all have only limited use of their hands, UK-based Leprosy Mission International is providing the majority of the funding for the project. The

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project includes ten homes as well as an additional building that will act as an examination center and activity center. The housing is very simple and consistent with housing in the area, its small size reflecting the poverty in the area. Each house consists of a single-story structure consisting of a flat roof with two rooms, one a combined sleeping and living room and the other a kitchen. During the visit, student and faculty volunteers from Shekou International School were on-site. They completed a perimeter wall and leveled the uneven ground. Contractors have been hired to build the actual houses, though Habitat experienced many delays due to poor local management of the workers. The local dermatological institute, the government organization responsible for care of leprosy patients, owns the land that the building site is located on.

15. (SBU) Though a variety of officials from Nanning, Congzuo and Fusui who were present during the Consulate's visit expressed enthusiasm over the project (perhaps because of the presence of the Consulate party), local farmers whose crops bordered the village were not supportive of the new buildings and accused HFH of encroaching on their land. The Habitat representative noted that local farmers have historically discriminated against the leprosy patients by stealing their few animals. The farmers also are resentful of both the attention being paid to the leprosy patients by Habitat as well as the land owned by the dermatological institute used to house the patients, which they regard as theirs and which probably was, in fact, taken from them when the original house were built. As a result, the farmers have sown crops up to the back wall of the HFH project and periodically have come by to shout protests against the project. Habitat will install locked doors on the old houses that are being vacated to enable leprosy patients use them as stables and barns to protect their small number of livestock and chickens.

Lacking Legal Status: Cutting Through Red Tape

¶6. (SBU) China does not officially recognize Habitat for Humanity as an NGO. Without this recognition, funding options are limited. The lack of legal status also makes routine tasks such as providing receipts to volunteer groups and other vendors difficult. The organization does not feel optimistic that it will gain legal status given China's complex NGO registration rules and historic distrust of NGOs. Unwilling to remain in limbo over its status, Habitat is trying to become affiliated with Guangxi University in Nanning as an education organization exploring the use of low-cost, user-friendly, and environmentally-friendly building materials, such as earth-concrete bricks. Under this proposal, Guangxi University's College of Civil Engineering and Architecture would provide administrative support and limited funding while Habitat would retain control over its funds and would have the freedom to do research into materials and construction techniques, conduct experiments (build houses), and provide training (to volunteers and homeowners).

¶7. (SBU) Habitat has submitted a proposal to the University to establish under the College of Civil Engineering and Architecture a center for research into low-cost and environmentally-friendly building materials. An example of preliminary work is a brick made from 90% dirt and 10% concrete that can be manually produced by farmers using a simple compression machine. The bricks can be used within seven days though they reach their full strength after 25 days. The bricks are interlocking and do not need mortar between their joints though mortar is poured around rebar supports down vertical holes that line up through all of the bricks. The proposal has been approved by the College but is awaiting final approval from the University itself.

Consulate Assistance

¶8. (SBU) Habitat asked the Consulate to support its proposal with the University. The Consul General took advantage of a visit to call on the University Vice President and its Foreign Affairs Office director to raise the topic of Habitat's proposal. The officials were

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familiar with the proposal and the Vice President said she had attended a committee meeting the previous evening to discuss the proposal but that no decision had been made. Habitat's representative, when told of the advocacy, was very appreciative of the Consulate's low-keyed expression of interest and expressed hope that this would be a boost to getting the proposal acted on.

Comment

¶9. (SBU) The future of Habitat for Humanity's Guangxi office remains in a state of flux. As of the date of the transmission of this message, Guangxi University has still not made a decision on Habitat's proposal. Habitat's representative in Guangxi expressed great concern over the future of the organization if the agreement with the University falls through. Habitat's international office has already drained all of its funds and resources for this fiscal year on relief efforts for victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the United States. Habitat's overall strategy for bypassing China's reluctance to grant NGO status to the organization is for its offices to become research centers. If the Guangxi University proposal fails, it is likely that the Guangxi branch will fold and become a part of the much more financially stable Hong Kong regional office. We also understand that Habitat may reorganize itself into a "business consultancy" headquartered in Hong Kong but operating through branches in China, thereby skirting the legal restrictions on foreign NGOs while essentially maintaining its operational model, sort of a Habitat for Humanity with Chinese characteristics.

¶10. (U) The next message in our "journey to the west" series is on our last stop in Guangxi, Behai -- almost literally the pearl of the region.

DONG